

EDITORIAL

Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) was an extremely well recognized and highly admired man of the 19th century, given his profound and vast knowledge in anthropology, archaeology, astronomy, botany, geography, geology, meteorology, oceanography, and zoology, as well as his scientific expeditions carried out in the Latin America (1799-1804), and Russia and Siberia (1829), in addition to his philanthropic attitude towards the advancement of science and humanity. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), a revered giant of the world literature and a contemporary of Alexander, once said in a private communication to his friend: "*He is a true cornucopia of natural science... His company is very stimulating and interesting indeed. You could not learn as much from books in a week as he teaches you in an hour*". This is a remarkable and magnificent pride in recognizing Alexander's tremendous knowledge, to the respected savant from the famous author of the celebrated *Faust*.

This special issue presents a commemoration of the 200 anniversary of Humboldt's return from the America. Two researchers were invited to write historical articles for remembering the *scientific* discovery of the New World. The first article summarizes some anecdotes of the scientific expedition and the relationship of Humboldt with other high-caliber scientists of his time. The second article presents some personal views of Humboldt on the epoch feat of Christopher Columbus that led to the great discovery of the America; his admiration to Columbus's preparation and firm character to attack this arduous enterprise is indeed overwhelming.

Humboldt himself spoke about the primordial purpose of his travel to the New Continent:

"I shall collect plants and fossils and make astronomic observations. But that's not the main purpose of my expedition. I shall try to find out how the forces of nature interact upon one another and how the geographic environment influence plant and animal life. In other words, I must find out about the unity of nature."

Certainly this was an ambitious enterprise to deal with by the German naturalist, only possible for giants in both intellect and physical conditions.

Considering the difficult time for the development of education and science in the Latin America to promote a more pious society, Humboldt's ideas and legacy left behind in these Latin countries will stand still and continuously serve for the construction of a better World based on cooperative, ingenious, perseverant and tenacious scientific work.

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